

Advisory Board of Public Works  
Monday, October 19, 2020 at 5:30pm  
Zoom Meeting

Attendance: Vice Chair Maria Palomino, Member Elena Proakis Ellis

1. Call to order at 5:33pm
2. Public Participation
  - **Mr. Barry Krasker 3 Mansion –**
    - 42 year resident – only home for 19 days – 1200 cf usage – He couldn't have used that much water. He explained his usage
    - Ms. Palomino – Asked if his sprinkler system could have had a leak
    - Mr. Krasker responded that his sprinkler system wasn't turned on until June 12, 2020 by a company. He checked the meter before he went to bed and again in the morning and there was no usage.
    - Ms. Proakis Ellis stated that his October usages is high.
    - Mr. Krasker said yes – his wife likes to garden.
    - Ms. Palomino asked if water meter has been replaced. The meter was checked and is only 5 years old.
    - Mr. Krasker said the Water Department had been out and checked the meter.
  - **Ms. Catherine Nigro – Lakeside Inn – North Ave**
    - Ms. Nigro – last three quarters water bills are in dispute
    - She supplied a spreadsheet with water usage
    - Due to Covid, the bar and restaurant are closed and occupancy is down to nothing.
    - 16% occupancy in May.
    - Years past occupancy was at 90% but the water usage was less than now.
    - They looked for sources of water usage. Had plumber come out three times.
    - 100 toilets – only found 3 running.
    - Not much water usage during Covid.
    - Ms. Palomino said only 3 toilets running?
    - Ms. Nigro said one of two ice machine shut off, no pool usage, no public restrooms usage.
    - Ms. Proakis Ellis - asked about May readings. Very big change from day to day.
    - Ms. Nigro said it's due to occupancy and they only use the washer once a week.
    - Ms. Proakis Ellis asked if she uses the same rooms so if a toilet is running it gets reset when a new guest comes in.
    - Ms. Nigro said they do not reuse a room because of Covid. They let the room air out. Plus because it is slow, her maintenance people are checking and double checking her rooms.
    - Ms. Palomino asked about outdoor sprinkler systems.
    - Ms. Nigro responded that they haven't used the outdoor sprinkler system in two years and they work off wells.
    - Ms. Proakis Ellis – asked about a typo.

- Ms. Proakis Ellis asked about January usage.
- Ms. Nigro said January is very slow.
- Ms. Proakis Ellis asked if check other usage beside May and night time usage.
- Ms. Nigro will run a test every night for two weeks.
- Ms. Proakis Ellis if the meter is running properly then we need to look at the flow.
- Ms. Nigro wasn't using washer.
- Ms. Proakis Ellis said usually when people come before the Board – they have a reason – a leak etc. but in this case the usage goes up and down so much – she isn't sure what to do. No reasons.
- Ms. Nigro said she knows nothing about meters but in a year where the Inn is basic closed – no restaurant – no bar – how could the water usage be up. She thinks something is wrong with the meter.
- Ms. Palomino asked the age of the meter and if Ms. Nigro has tried the dye tablets
- Ms. Nigro will do whatever she needs to do to solve this.
- Ms. Proakis Ellis thinks the tablets are worth a try. The sarcastic usage makes her think there could be an intermittent leak.
- Ms. Palomino asked if someone had checked the meter and its age.
- Ms. Waitt stated that it was a Sensus meter. Installed 2013.
- Ms. Proakis Ellis asked what the meter size is.
- Mr. Conway responded that is 3 inch - standard.
- Ms. Palomino asked how we could get tablets to Lakeside Inn.
- Ms. Waitt said she would drop them off.
- Ms. Nigro asked what the next steps would be, after she does the tablets when can she come back before the Board.
- Ms. Proakis Ellis said to look at the meter at night for a couple weeks.
- Ms. Nigro said some of her guest are up all night.
- Ms. Nigro said the plumber said the meter moves bizarrely quickly.

Mr. Sean Gilligan –39 Sweaters Street

- Had some issues with high water bills
- He wanted to know about tier system and why the public wasn't notified. It's like a tax increase. When you have a family, you will definitely going to be in tier 2 or 3 with a family. When you fill a pool, there is already an upcharge because you don't use the sewer.
- He would like monthly billing so he wouldn't go into tier 2, 3 or 4.
- Ms. Proakis said that every year this board reviews to meet our obligations of the water and sewer funds. There would have been a rate increase this year when if we went with a flat rate. Everyone would have seen a piece of that increase. MWRA communities must use a rate block system and promote conservation. Board had the option to use a tiered system – first tier which everyone gets so that rate did not go up. There was an increase in tier 2 but it was about what the increase would be if we had a flat rate because it evens out for the average family. Hoping for more conservation with the non-essential water use – watering lawn, etc.
- Mr. Gilligan said he would prefer an overall rate increase over the tiered system. He said he explained that he changed the bulb in his pool and drained it done to 3 quarters and

was told it had to be drained down to the bottom. He said he didn't need to and felt penalized by that.

- Ms. Proakis Ellis said that people did receive the new tier system with the summer bills so it was a double whammy. Thinks that when we get into the winter months people will notice it's not that big of an increase.
- Mr. Gilligan asked if the tier rates were here to stay.
- Ms. Proakis Ellis stated that the rates were voted in for Fiscal 21 and approved by the Council. If the community hates it and comes before the board for Fiscal 22 it's not set in stone. We did go thru an extensive study with a consultant who recommended a number of different option and this is where we ended up.
- Mr. Gilligan asked if there was going to be an option for a second meter. The price of the sewer is three times the cost of the water.
- Ms. Proakis Ellis stated about a year ago if they did offer a second meter there would be a list of conditions to go along with the second meter. She would say it's out of the question but all these other factors needed to be looked at.
- Mr. Gilligan asked if there are still second meters in the community.
- Ms. Waitt answered yes there are.
- Ms. Palomino said thank you. It is an important topic. The Board did spend a lot of time looking at the rate review and nothing is ideal. Tried to help people on a fixed income. Very difficult to do during these trying times. She is trying at home to conserve.

#### 410 Salem St #510

- Ms. Waitt explain that the resident hadn't done a Zoom call before and not sure she could call in, but still wanted her case reviewed.
- Ms. Palomino asked what the concern was.
- Ms. Waitt stated that the resident had a very high bill while she left her mother at her house while she went to Florida. She wasn't sure if her elderly mother left the water on....
- Ms. Palomino stated that we just aren't sure where the water went but it went through the meter. She said I guess we will wait on her?
- Ms. Waitt stated that she would check in with the resident.

#### 3. Water disputes

- Ms. Waitt explained that there were nine disputes and we couldn't come to a determination on the Lakeside Inn and 410 Salem St. We sent out reject letters with reasons why it wasn't accepted.
- Mr. Conway thinks that the moratorium on second meters is up in Fiscal 22 but he will have to check.
- Ms. Proakis Ellis said that she doesn't understand why we don't offer them.
- Mr. Conway stated that he thinks the only question is how to fund the difference in the effect of the sewer rate might be affected. WE didn't have the funds to float what the difference or the impact might look like. We would need to have a cost study and make a policy. We would need to do an in-depth look in to it.
- Ms. Proakis Ellis aske dif people with second meters now are still only paying for water and no sewer.
- Mr. Conway responded yes and state that there was a short period of time in either the late 90's early 2000's that the moratorium was lifted for a brief period of time.
- Ms. Proakis Ellis asked how many second meters do we have.
- Mr. Conway answered less than 200 but probably closer to 100.

How should we proceed on these cases:

- Ms. Proakis Ellis was not sure how we would proceed with the Hotel because there is no information – just erratic water use. On Salem Street, same as Hotel – no information. Historically, we don't just give relief without back up.
- Ms. Proakis said she would like to give relief.
- Ms. Palomino said we have no policy to handle these as the Town doesn't have a pot of money to settle these. Wants a consistent why to handle these.
- Ms. Proakis wants standard practice on these.
- Mr. Conway said in Burlington they allow one unexplained water use abatement per decade.
- Ms. Waitt said they looked at other Cities and Towns policies and they were pretty firm.
- Mr. Conway stated that you have to understand one person is taking on the hardship but on the other hand 8000 don't have to take on that burden. We aren't passing that cost on to them.
- Ms. Palomino would like a standard fall back. She asked Mrs. Proakis Ellis what they do in Melrose.
- Ms. Proakis Ellis stated that Melrose has the ability to pull 90 days of hourly data off the meter so they have much more information and we identify leaks very quickly because their meters provide a list of location that appear to be leaking and they notify residents. Their system allows them to be more proactive so fewer disputes. Haven't had an abatement meeting in a long while.
- Ms. Waitt stated that we see a high read we do call the resident to see if we can figure out the issue before we send the bill.
- Mr. Conway asked if Ms. Proakis Ellis know the cost of their system. He said we are close to having fix based metering.
- Ms. Proakis Ellis if our meters can do that.
- Mr. Conway stated yes the reader on the outside could send this information.
- Ms. Proakis Ellis said she would put Donna Cardillo in touch with Mr. Conway.
- Ms. Palomino stated that this would be extremely helpful.

#### 4. Board Update

- Mr. Conway – RFP is out. Took ideas from Sustainability committee and incorporated them in the RFP.